

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEA-10 H-01 EUR-12 PM-05 NSC-05
SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 ACDA-07 MC-02
EA-07 L-03 TRSE-00 OMB-01 IGA-02 AID-05 EB-07
COME-00 /102 W

-----036921 221607Z /45

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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9495
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ANTANANARIVO 1347

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: MARR, MASS, MILI, PFOR, MA, US, UR
SUBJECT: RUMORED TRANSFER OF MIGS TO MADAGASCAR

REFS: (A) ANTANANARIVO 1915, (B) USDAO IR 6 860 0026 77 O JUNE 1977

SUMMARY. CHARGE AND DATT HAVE SEPARATELY BEEN APPROACHED BY
VARIOUS SOURCES REPORTING IMPENDING SOVIET GIFT OR SALE OF
MIG AIRCRAFT TO MADAGASCAR AND ASKING U.S. INTERVENTION.
END SUMMARY.

1. ON JULY 20 THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR CAME TO SEE CHARGE TO
RELATE REPORT FROM CLAUDE RATSIMANDRESY, FORMER DIRECTOR OF
BILATERAL RELATIONS AT MALAGASY FOREIGN MINISTRY, PRESENTLY
WITH THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, BUT UNASSIGNED, THAT PRESIDENT
RATSIRAKA IS ABOUT TO SIGN A MILITARY COOPERATION PACT WITH
THE SOVIET UNION THROUGH WHICH MADAGASCAR WOULD ACQUIRE TWENTY
MIG AIRCRAFT FOR A NOMINAL PRICE. RATSIMANDRESY DID NOT CLAIM
TO KNOW WHAT THE SOVIETS WOULD GET IN RETURN, BUT SAID THE
AGREEMENT WAS TO BE SIGNED IN ABOUT THREE WEEKS.

2. RATSIMANDRESY ASKED JAPANESE AMBASSADOR TO INFORM THE
USG OF THIS DEVELOPMENT, BUT TO DO IT THROUGH HIS FOREIGN
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MINISTRY IN TOKYO RATHER THAN THROUGH AMERICAN EMBASSY
MADAGASCAR. HE TOLD JAPANESE AMBASSADOR THAT HE WANTED THE
INFORMATION CONVEYED IN THIS FASHION TO THE USG BECAUSE
(A) HE WAS NOT TRUSTED BY THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN
ANTANANARIVO AND (B) THIS EMBASSY WOULD INFORM THE FRENCH
WHO ARE BACKERS OF RATSIRAKA AND WOULD THEREFORE HELP HIM
TO SCOTCH ANY ACTION AGAINST THE MIG TRANSACTION.

RATSIMANDRESY ALSO SAID THAT MADAGASCAR'S PRESENT INTEREST IN ACQUIRING A BOEING 747 AND THE LOCKHEED HERCULES WAS PART AND PARCEL OF ITS PLAN FOR MILITARY RAPPROCHEMENT WITH THE SOVIETS. IF THE PURCHASES OF THE AMERICAN AIRCRAFT WENT THROUGH, IT WOULD CLAIM THAT THIS ACQUISITION OF MIGS WAS A BALANCING ACT. IF THE PURCHASES ABORTED, IT WOULD SAY THAT IN VIEW OF AMERICAN UNRESPONSIVENESS IT HAD BEEN FORCED TO TURN TO THE SOVIETS.

3. ON JULY 22, IN COURSE OF EGYPTIAN NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION, MME. LALAO RAKOTONIRAINY, WIDOW OF THE LATE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE POPULAR ARMED FORCES, PROVIDED DATT WITH ESSENTIALLY SAME INFORMATION. SHE SAID PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA WAS ABOUT TO MAKE A STUPID MOVE (BETISE) AND ASKED AMEMBASSY TO URGENTLY CONTACT USG TO INTERVENE. DATT, WHO HAS BEEN PREVIOUSLY CONTACTED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS BY MME. RAKOTONIRAINY FOR U.S. SUPPORT OF PLANS TO DEPOSE RATSIRAKA (SEE REFTELS) BROKE OFF CONVERSATION.

4. AT SAME RECEPTION, COMMANDER OF THE AERONAVAL FORCES, LCOL R. MICHEL RAKOTOBÉ, WHO HAS NEVER BEFORE EXPLICITLY EXPRESSED ANTI-RATSIRAKA SENTIMENTS TO AMEMBASSY PERSONNEL, CONFIRMED THAT SOVIETS ARE PUTTING MUCH PRESSURE ON RATSIRAKA TO ACCEPT TWELVE MIG-21 AIRCRAFT. RAKOTOBÉ SAID THAT MADAGASCAR DOES NOT NEED FIGHTER AIRCRAFT BUT

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RATHER TRANSPORTS; HIS MAJOR CONCERN, HOWEVER, APPEARED TO BE THE INCREASING NUMBER OF SOVIETS IN MADAGASCAR. HE APPEALED TO DATT FOR THE U.S. TO SOMEHOW BLOCK THE SOVIETS' MOVE.

5. LATER, AT SAME RECEPTION, LCDR ROLAND RATSIMANDRESY (NO RELATION TO CLAUDE RATSIMANDRESY), SENIOR NAVAL OFFICER ON ACTIVE DUTY WITH THE NAVY AND RAKOTOBÉ'S DEPUTY, MADE MUCH THE SAME APPROACH TO DATT. WHEN ASKED WHAT HE EXPECTED THE U.S. TO DO, HE QUOTED FRENCH SAYING THAT MORE FLIES ARE CAUGHT WITH HONEY THAN VINEGAR. HE REPORTED THAT SECOND MI-8 HELICOPTER WILL BE DELIVERED TO PORT OF TAMATAVE JULY 25 AND THAT THERE ARE EIGHTEEN SOVIETS ARRIVING IN MADAGASCAR IN CONNECTION WITH THIS DELIVERY. AS HAD RAKOTOBÉ, HE EXPRESSED ALARM AT NUMBER OF SOVIETS IN COUNTRY. RATSIMANDRESY SAID THAT MAJOR CLOVIS HENRY,

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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ANTANANARIVO 1347

COMMANDER OF THE AIR SQUADRON AT IVATO AND FIRST MALAGASY
PILOT TO BE TRAINED IN THE SOVIET UNION TO FLY THE MI-8,
IS FURIOUS AT NOT BEING PERMITTED TO FLY, SCHEDULE, OR
HAVE READY ACCESS TO THE MI-8, WHICH IS IN HIS SQUADRON.

6. DATT INTRODUCED AALUSNA POULAIN TO MAJOR HENRY AND HIS
WIFE AT JULY FOURTH RECEPTION. MME. HENRY HAS RECENTLY MADE
URGENT APPEAL FOR SOCIAL CONTACT FOR HERSELF AND THE
MAJOR WITH POULAIN AND HIS WIFE. IT NOW APPEARS PROBABLE
THAT YET ANOTHER REQUEST FOR U.S. INTERVENTION IN THIS
MATTER IS ABOUT TO BE MADE.

7. COMMENT. I AM NOT SURE HOW MUCH CREDIT TO GIVE TO
THIS STORY. AT LEAST THREE OF THE INFORMANTS, MME.
RAKOTONIRAINY, CLAUDE RATSIMANDRESY, AND LCOL RAKOTOBE
ARE KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT, AND THE OTHER TWO
PERSONS CITED MAY ALSO BE IN THE SAME ANTI-RATSIRAKA
MERINA CABAL. IT IS THEREFORE POSSIBLE THAT
(A) ALL THOSE STORIES TRACE BACK TO THE SAME SOURCE WHICH
MAY BE IN ERROR, OR (B) THEY MAY BE INVENTING THE STORY
OUT OF WHOLE CLOTH TO PERSUADE US TO BACK OPPONENTS OF
RATSIRAKA, AT LEAST MORALLY, AS SOME OF THEM HAVE ALREADY
TRIED TO DO IN THE PAST. THE REPORTS ARE ALSO SOMEWHAT
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VAGUE AND WITH SLIGHT VARIATIONS. IT IS NOT SPECIFIED
WHAT SOVIETS WOULD GET IN RETURN, AND STORIES DISAGREE ON
NUMBER OF PLANES AND WHETHER RATSIRAKA IS ABOUT TO AGREE
OR IS JUST BEING PRESSED HARD BY SOVIETS. WE MAY HOPEFULLY

BE ABLE TO ASSESS RELIABILITY OF REPORT MORE ACCURATELY
AFTER POULAIN HAS SEEN MAJOR HENRY.

8. POSSIBILITY THAT RATSIRAKA WOULD WANT TO ACQUIRE THESE
AIRCRAFT IS NOT IN ITSELF FAR-FETCHED. HE HAS ALREADY
ACQUIRED COMMUNIST MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND MAY BE WILLING
TO GET MORE, ESPECIALLY IF IT IS ON GRANT BASIS. HIS
CONCERN WITH AIRBORN ESCAPES FROM MADAGASCAR IN PAST AND
VIOLATIONS OF MALAGASY AIRSPACE MIGHT MAKE A SQUADRON
OF FIGHTER AIRCRAFT ATTRACTIVE TO HIM AS THE MALAGASY
AIR FORCE HAS ONLY TRANSPORTS AND TRAINERS AT PRESENT.

9. WHATEVER THE DEGREE OF TRUTH BEHIND THESE REPORTS,
I DOUBT THAT ANYTHING WE CAN SAY OR DO WOULD CHANGE
RATSIRAKA'S MIND IF HE IS CONTEMPLATING SUCH A TRANSACTION.
THE MALAGASY GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO DISPLAY GREAT
INDIFFERENCE TO OUR OPINIONS, AND RATSIRAKA COULD REPLY
TO ANY ARGUMENTS OF OURS THAT OTHER NATIONS, I.E.,
TANZANIA, HAVE MIGS AND ARE STILL ACCEPTED BY US AS NON-
ALIGNED. WE WILL MAKE FURTHER COMMENT AFTER POULAIN
AND HENRY CONTACT.BARRETT

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